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ABSTRACT

Twenty constructs about writing instruction were identified in a study during which 91 teachers responded to and free-sorted 40 statements about the teaching of writing. A latent partition analysis was applied in order to summarize the data and to make apparent the major similarities in all the teachers' categorizations. Some of the identified constructs are: (1) ideal teachers of writing are interested in their students as people and respect their individuality; (2) learning to write is a conscious mechanical skill acquired in a progressive sequence with the teacher dispensing the precepts governing writing and the students learning by drill; (3) what the teacher of writing needs, when writing, is to be a good audience, a receptive and encouraging reader rather than a judge; (4) that the most serious faults in student writing involve confused expressions or hazy ideas rather than just mechanical errors; (5) writing is dependent upon speech; (6) neither the use of models and samples of good writing nor the preteaching of rhetoric can help students to recognize and solve their own writing problems; and (7) students need to be helped to write for a variety of needs and purposes. (E00)

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THE HEADWATERS: ENGLISH TEACHERS' CONSTRUCTS
OF TEACHING WRITING

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Paper Presented at the International Conference,
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THE HEADWATERS: ENGLISH TEACHERS'
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Ideas are so amorphous that you haven't
really thought them out in a logical way.

(Teacher 1901)

INTRODUCTION

Although there may seem to be little correspondence between the academic concerns of Psychology and Sociology and the more practical interests of teachers, each of them emphasises at least in part the perspectives of individuals within delimited kinds of subcultural worlds. In the past, investigations have been made of the distinctive ideas or constructs used by cafe society, ethnic minorities and occupational groups, as well as by delinquents, disadvantaged children and reluctant learners. For example, Schatzmann and Strauss (1966) studied the conceptual structures or the organising principles that psychiatrists use to shape their field of expertise. As a professional community, teachers of English also possess a set of implicit assumptions or conventional understandings. However, studies of the collective ideas or categories that teachers perceive as structuring the area of pedagogy are rare. Foremost among these innovative studies are those of Miller et al. (1967). They asked how experienced elementary teachers perceived their own actions and how they thought about their own efforts to stimulate and direct learning. In the present study, the more specific domain relating to English teachers' views of the teaching of written expression is explored.

METHOD

A number of different techniques are available to measure such ideas or constructs: sentence completion, in-depth interviewing, word association, Kelly's Repertory test, the Q-sort, the semantic differential and a free object sort. Even though each of these measures is still surrounded by a goodly crop of theories, Kelly's (1955:141) electronic analogue of the information-processing model of thinking suggests that a writing task is appropriate since it takes account of the process whereby, when people are encountering events, they "light up" certain of their categories or constructs. These categories represent kinds of meaning patterns which they continually project upon their world. As they come back and forth across a particular field, they pick up bits of meaning.

The more adequate their scanning patterns, the more meaningful their world becomes.

Brunswik (1956) has stressed the importance of personal relevance and representativeness of events or stimuli. He implies that in the examination of cognitive or perceptual processes no arbitrary list of concepts or traits should be compiled but that elements should be representative of the universe of elements habitually used by the subjects themselves in describing the particular stimulus realm. Zajonc (1960) accordingly elicits the initial information or items to be sorted from his subjects. However, Brunerian (1965) cites research (Leopore 1961; Tripathi and Dixit, 1961) in personal construct psychology which shows that personal constructs and provided constructs produce functionally equivalent measures at least of cognitive complexity which represents the degree of differentiation of a conceptual system. Dixit was a student of Kelly at the time when the theory of personal constructs was formulated. The conclusion is that it makes less difference to the normal person than to the autistic whether or not he has to express himself in provided dimensions. Supplied elements seem useful in studies involving group comparisons.

The first step in the present study involved the generation of statements about the teaching of writing which the teachers could read. These items were derived, not directly from interviewing teachers, but from the researcher's reading a search of the most recent and relevant literature as contained in widely used text and reference books, periodicals and treatises of teaching. The number of the resultant statements about the teaching of writing are cited in the references below. The procedure is regarded as valid since Miller et al. (1967-1968) report that, while it is extremely time consuming to interview even thirty teachers in order to generate items for writing, comparable results are obtained by making a systematic selection of stimuli from the relevant literature. In the present study, the teachers themselves commented on the representativeness of the coding statements. They claimed to have heard many of them previously from teacher educators, administrators and from other classroom teachers. The items seemed to relate directly to their teaching lives.

A five-point scale was used as providing an alternative method of scoring statements to allow for quantification of the responses but without unduly influencing the form of the statements. It was selected instead of

a Repertory test for three reasons. First, the events to be construed were taken from the domain of the teaching of writing and consisted of teaching behaviours rather than relations with particular people. Second, a free-sort permits the teachers to generate only those relationships or constructs which they normally use themselves. Finally, sixty-three teachers rather than just a few individuals were being investigated.

The skills-based and the growth-oriented pedagogies discussed by Brunshine (1976) were used to guide the sampling of statements in an *a priori* fashion. For example, Items 16 and 63 correspond to more traditional viewpoints:

Learning to write is a conscious, mechanical skill learned in a progressive sequence of techniques for combining words into sentences, sentences into paragraphs and paragraphs into an essay. The teacher diagnoses weaknesses, prescribes and principles and the pupils learn to drill. (16)

The teacher must control the topic to be written about and the way in which it may be written about; she also must be the audience for whom her pupils write; she sets the length and time limits. All the pupil has to do is perform and then receive the indicated reward. (63)

In contrast, Items 2, 10 and 62 exemplify a more progressive construct system:

As they mature, young people naturally learn to write (2)

Our pupils are essentially positive, creative beings and in their writing they can attain to creative insights valuable to themselves and others. (10)

The chief concern of the English program is to enable children to use their developing resources of language to explore their personal experiences. (62)

The hundred of these statements were pre-tested on a homogeneous group of nine experienced and practicing teachers of Grade 10 English. From this pilot, eighty items emerged as being unambiguous and too general. Given the constraints set permitted by the volume printing time of only ninety minutes, the number of cards was fixed at eight. This sample was presented with Kelly's recommendation of twenty stimuli one at a time for all ten schizophrenia subjects. As further support Hillier et al. (1967) found that after allowing for training no more than 100 statements could be sorted in ten hours.

The eighty items were printed on cards (like a Sort experiment) as a voluntary sample of the teachers of Grade 10 English for twenty-two

The sorting session was held with groups of no more than eight teachers at any one time. In all, ninety-three sorters, were used and each of them was identified by means of a four digit code number. Miller et al. (1976) have advised that stable base line data are obtained if a heterogenous sample of at least thirty sorters is available.

After a training task involving the sorting of complex hexagons had been completed, each teacher was presented with the deck of eighty different cards. Each card was numbered with the corresponding number on the reverse side. The number was assigned strictly in an alphabetic fashion so that as few clues as possible were given for the classification. It was a free-sort in that the subjects were able to group the statements on whatever basis they thought appropriate, apart from agreement or disagreement. The instructions were as follows:

To form your groups please carry out the following directions ONE STEP AT A TIME:

1. READ and THINK the first statement or card.
2. DECIDE what aspect of teaching writing this statement concerns.
3. WRITE a tentative outline of this idea on the first envelope, which you then number as ONE. This gives the group a name, so that for each group you will have a NUMBER for thinking its component statements go together, irrespective of whether you agree or disagree with them.
4. PUT the statement inside the NUMBER envelope.
5. REPEAT steps 1-4 for each statement. If any ONE STEP concerns the SAME aspect of teaching writing as one that you have previously sorted, PUT THE TWO together in the same envelope. If not, begin a new group by writing a new, tentative title on another envelope and placing the statement inside it. NUMBER each envelope.
6. REORGANISE. At anytime during the sorting task, you may come across a statement that does not seem to belong where you had previously placed it; you may do one of three things with it:
 IF YES: Put it in the same group envelope where you think it now belongs.
 OR Put it in a new group with it and name the envelope.
 OR Put it in with the other statements not yet sorted.
7. CHECK your groupings carefully when you have finished assigning all the 80 statements into categories. Before the end of each category add special remarks for details the statements seem to you to SHARE. REVISIT. You may also say changes you like to making, combining or excluding the words of statements. Group construction statements can be placed in the same group, providing that they deal with the same item or topic.
8. CHECK finally to see that you have written a short phrase on each envelope which that you think best describes the meaning

unifying IDEA that caused you to place the statements together. EACH envelope should be NUMBERED so that you can tell how many groups you have formed and each of them can be identified. Remember, however, that, as far as this project is concerned, there are NO right or wrong answers.

9. Remember that your groups can consist of DIFFERENT NUMBERS of statements; a group can consist of MANY OR FEW items.
10. Fifteen minutes before the end of the session you will be able to review your groupings.

PLEASE START. DO NOT HURRY AS YOU HAVE 80 MINUTES.

The data-gathering procedure is regarded as sufficiently reliable since when another sample consisting of eleven teachers in their fourth year of professional preparation, together with two very experienced, well qualified and promoted teachers of English, sorted the eighty items on two separate occasions, one month apart, the mean measure of self-agreement that resulted was .71, with a range of .36 to .93.

When the teachers sorted the items, they produced manifest partitions of the sets of cards. Their individual subsets or groups were regarded as manifest categories or constructs. The statistical operation known as Latent Partition Analysis was applied in order to summarize the data and to make apparent the major similarities in all the teachers' categorizations. This technique identified empirically the set of categories that was presumed to be latent in the population of teachers being studied.

The sorting data had first been checked, for each of the ninety-three subjects, to ensure that there were no errors; that is, that the eighty items had been sorted, that the number of classifications was correct and that each item had been placed in one, and only one, category. This was essential preparation for the analysis.

From the "clean" data, a second program constructed a joint proportions matrix. This was an 80×80 matrix, A , where a_{ij} =

number of subjects who placed items i and j together
total number of subjects.

If a_{ij} is low (approximately zero), then very few teachers placed the two items in the same category. However, if a_{ij} is high (approximately unity), then most teachers grouped items i and j . The matrix thus provided a measure of the relationship between each pair of items.

A principal factor analysis was next applied in order to discover the unrotated factors that existed in the previous proportions matrix together with the latent roots of the factors. Following suggestions made by Wiley (1967) and Evans (1970), those principal components with latent roots greater than unity were iterated to provide a principal factor solution. The principal factor coefficients formed the input for the final program to compute category probabilities and coefficients. In this way, the twenty nuclear categories or major ideas used by the teachers were identified. They are summarized in Table 1 and then interpreted below in any given category. The full Table 4.18 has been presented by Diamond (1979).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

RESULTS

Category I: Teacher-Student Relationship

This first idea is fairly widely held. It focuses on a sound relationship, or personal contact between the teachers and their students, as being of the utmost importance in the successful teaching of writing. Such trust and mutuality are established and nourished by warm, individualized talk or chat. The ideal teachers of writing are interested in their students as people and respect their individuality. Though the "first among equals," they are never the "law givers" (item 49). While items 24 and 63 constitute the nucleus of Category VIII (Teacher Domination) below, they each have only a very low probability of being included also in Category I. These two constructs are accordingly taken as representing opposing or mutually exclusive pedagogies.

Category II: The Mechanical Skills

Not only is this category often perceived but it is also formed as a tightly knit grouping. In contrast to the child-centered approach implicit in Category I, this category represents the viewpoint that learning to write is a conscious mechanical skill acquired in a progressive sequence that involves the combination of words into sentences, sentences into paragraphs and paragraphs into essays. The teacher dispenses the principles governing writing and those the pupils learn by drill. One of these ideas is that there are three basic stages in all writing: pre-planning, writing

and revision of the draft (item 58). This is "the one way" view of teaching writing. Writing is itself described as being organized and mainly expository in character. This construct recalls a traditional pedagogy.

Category III: Motivation

Though this is a less popular and less cohesive category, motivation is undoubtedly the deciding factor in the items being grouped. At all costs, even to matters of formal accuracy, the teacher needs to maintain the students' urge to write since everyone writes for pleasure and enjoyment. The students' ultimate conclusion needs to be that writing *per se* is pleasurable and recreational, but teaching students to write stilted classroom essays does not achieve this goal. If students are to write anything worthwhile, they need to be motivated.

Category IV: Feedback

The common belief expressed by this prevalent grouping of items relates to feedback. What the teacher of writing needs, when marking, is first of all to be a good audience, a receptive and encouraging reader rather than a judge, since the writing of students improves if it is praised rather than criticized. Feedback needs to be available when essays are returned and much of the evaluation of writing can be left to the peer-group.

Category V: Difficulties in Writing

This category indicates that writing is difficult for everyone and not uniquely so for students. Writing is demanding because of its abstract nature, the uncertainty of the intended audience, and because writing serves many different functions and purposes. The most serious faults in student writing, according to this grouping of items, involve confused expressions of very ideas rather than just mechanical errors. The real problem in writing is trying to learn it in school under negative conditions which are neither supportive nor individualized (item 57). The question of pupil progress in writing, or the lack of it, is central to that effective effectiveness.

Category VI: Developmental Writing Sequence

According to this idea, all students enjoy free or creative writing and its associated mode encourages literacy; however, creative writing need not become a cult for incoherence. At its best personal, expressive

writing provides the basis for future development toward expository writing as well. If this construct represents a progressive ideology, it does not seem to be very widely held by the teachers.

Category VII: The Importance of Talk

This was the most universally perceived of the twenty categories. The perception is that writing is so deeply dependent upon speech that lack of proficiency in talking could result in minimal proficiency in writing as well. Written English is not superior to spoken English but rather the written mode is so dependent upon the oral that pupils ought to be encouraged to write initially as they speak. Since items 77, 80 and 33 have reasonable probabilities of also being grouped in Category VI, these two categories probably inter-relate to produce a growth-centred approach to the teaching of writing.

Category VIII: Growth

This was one of the more widely recognised groupings. The chief concern of English is seen as enabling the students to develop language so that they can explore their own personal experiences. The defining items (42, 47 and 53) have extremely low probabilities of being grouped in the opposing construct which relates to the mechanical skills (Category II). Contrary to the traditional view, the growth-centred perspective is that the most important writing is of a poetic or imaginative nature, since it permits the young to explore their personal feelings and thoughts. This may reflect current educational optimism whereby all students can deal with their personal experiences in writing and, as people, they are never impoverished. Category VIII recalls a progressive pedagogy in espousing such a positive view of students and writing. However, because teachers relate such items does not mean that they necessarily subscribe to the idea. They also need to be committed to it if their actual teaching is to be affected.

Category IX: Deductive Teaching of Writing

As indicated by this somewhat mixed and loosely knit category, neither the use of models and samples of good writing nor the pre-teaching of rhetoric may help students to recognise and solve their own writing problems. Reading is of assistance but writing is not so simply "taught." Writing plus the teaching of writing leads to an improvement in writing; if the teaching is omitted, the results are disappointing. Because of its

bipolar nature, this category closely resembles one of Kelly's personal constructs. It is salient also because it includes the idea that writing does need to be taught.

Category X: Writing Topics

This dichotomous grouping is similar to the previous category in that it contains both critical and constructive, negative and positive poles. Part of the perception is that students ought not write about controversial things which are dismissed as ugly and sordid. Such a censorious kind of viewpoint can succeed in banning reality from the classroom. It is also seen, however, that critical and abstract topics on set books can be replaced by personal, open letters written to their authors by the students themselves.

Category XI: Natural Development

Many teachers possessed this element of a nativistic, operational view of the teaching of writing which claims that as they mature young people naturally learn to write. Children learn written language only by using it; they write in order to learn rather than learning about writing in order to write. If maturation is so predominant, contradictory teaching approaches may not produce differential impacts on student writing and improvements in it may be very slow to accumulate and only gradually emerge.

Category XII: Sense of Audience

Category XII is an operational type of construct which is similar to the previous grouping in that it emphasises that classroom discourse needs to be authentic and not a pseudo-kind of "dummy-run." Students write because they want to say something, for real reasons of their own, that they want to impart to a definite audience. If they have something they deeply care about, they will want to express it more clearly and will be responsive to their teachers' help. Classmates provide the most natural audience and they write better when they write for each other.

Category XIII: The Ideal Teacher of Writing

Many teachers were conscious of ideal or archetypal kinds of teachers of writing. Such teachers, it is thought, need carefully thought-through rationales lest their teaching of writing become muddled or lopsided. But as well as being rational and purposeful, they are also distinguished by their own creative and imaginative written productions.

Indeed, they write most of the assignments that they set since they want to be more constructive and sympathetic critics of their students' work. The more loosely formed character of this association of ideas perhaps suggests differing points of view as to the characteristics of such teachers.

Category XIV: Correctness versus Appropriateness

This construct signifies that, as current thought and syllabuses suggest, students need to be helped to write for a variety of needs and purposes; that is, in order to produce a number of "correct" Englishes, each of which is appropriate to its own register.

Category XV: Inductive Teaching of Writing

This cluster of items was controversial in that it was not formed by many teachers at all. This was possibly because it argues for the unthinkable; that is, if students are taught nothing about composition, if they write when and if they want to, and if their work is not "corrected" but only talked about, their writing becomes no worse than it does with all the present teaching and testing! Once again, some of the teachers were exploring the possibility that students' writing might not progress in an academic year with typical teaching.

The category branches to indicate that personal writing need not be corrected and that fluency, vitality, vividness and honesty are more important attributes than simple correctness. If the teacher begins by rewarding substance rather than form, matters of accuracy can be dealt with later when the pupil cares enough about communicating. The child's intentionality needs first to be tapped. Both Categories XI and XV challenge many of the more conventional assumptions about the teaching of writing.

Category XVI: The Best Writing

A kind of platonic principle seems to underpin this more fragmented category and it refers to what constitutes, in an absolute sense, "the best writing." Simple, accurate and expository writing is preferred above all. It is direct and honest, active in mood and non-elaborated. The best writing scrupulously avoids mechanical errors and clichés.

Category XVII: Students' Positive and Creative Nature

This idealistic construct draws attention to pupils as essentially positive and creative beings who have as their birthright the ability to create art within all the media, including writing. Their writing consequently can be read as a form of literature in which they can attain

to valuable insights. The "heartiest" of this grouping scores Category VIII since its central items (35 and 36) have moderate probabilities of also being included in the central growth-related construct.

Category XVIII: Teacher Domination

The difficulty here is that pupils may all too easily learn to write only what they think their teachers want, especially if they are always the sole intended audience. In sharp contrast to the views expressed by Categories I and XII, it is suggested that the teachers themselves need to set the topics for writing, to decide the form the response must take and that they alone then read it. All the pupils are required to do is to obey by revising the errors the teachers indicate. This construct seems to represent an extremely traditional viewpoint.

Category XIX: The Futility of Abstractions

This category had the lowest probability of any of the twenty groupings of being formed and it is also somewhat mixed. While all writing requires some organisation, if this is over-emphasised, inspiration can be stifled. Yet the traditional writing lesson emphasises the *tripes* its format of introduction, body and conclusion. The teachers in their feedback can help the young writers to discover alternative forms of expression, rather than commenting on the writing in terms of vague abstractions such as organisation, unity, coherence, and topic sentences.

Category XX: Criticism of Conventional Teaching of Writing

This was a commonly created construct and it seems rather typical. Though the item membership is not as sure as that of other categorisations, the construct deals with a crucial and disturbing dilemma. The writing of pupils in school is seen as being too seldom chosen, clear, vigorous or original. Forty-five per cent of the teachers perceived that, in their last year of compulsory schooling, the writing of most pupils may not improve, it may not stand still -- it may deteriorate!

DISCUSSION

The results show that not only were twenty constructs shared by the teachers but also two distinctive construct systems or networks relating to the traditional and the progressive pedagogies could be identified. The skills-based repertoire seems to consist of Categories II, IV, V, IX, XII, and XVIII; that is, the Mechanical Skills, Feedback, Difficulties, Deductive Teaching, the Best Writing and Teacher Domination. As an example

The traditional American writer and reader tends most likely to Category II but also moderately to Categories V, II and VII. Items 6 and 20 from Category II have considerable probability of being included as well in Category V; that is, the mechanical skills and difficulties in writing seem to define a common, deeper pedagogy that could be described as traditional.

In the discussion of Categories I and III above, there are some items that have exclusive membership either in Category II (listed as in Category VIII (French)) and there are others that belong either in Category VIII (Teacher Education) or in Category I (Teacher-Student Relationship). Categories I, III, IV, VII, VIII, IX, XIII, XV, XVI and 20 seem to associate to support a more progressive pedagogy. It consists of Teacher-Student Relationship, Motivation, Developmental Response, the Importance of Talk, the French Model, Natural Development, the Social Teacher of Writing, Inductive Teaching, Students' Reaction Values and Criticism of Conventional Teaching of Writing. In the discussion of Categories XV and XVI above, some items are shared by a degree by Categories VIII and VIII and by Categories II and IV respectively; that is, the growth model is defined by the position values of students, the natural development of writing and by inductive teaching.

The teachers' categories have been interpreted as constructs which correspond in turn to their common-sense knowledge about the teaching of writing. This construction provides theoretical and empirical support. For example, Kelly's key theoretical construct is the term "construct" itself already a process is regarded as a categorizing construct both in providing and in maintaining. All processes involve categorization so that, even when something is new that has never been presented before, it is immediately still categorized as "something not new before". At least, students are categorized in the sense that the various aspects of the differentially, for example, with light and sound. In the other sense, as complex social behavior, categorizing is also related to that people seek to achieve depending on how they have conceptualized them, the most general social category probably being "an entire class." (Kelly 1955: 159-160) states:

that is, in terms of the nature of perception is that it is in its most different from other kinds of categorized information based on differing attributes.... one of the principal characteristics of perception is a characteristic of cognitive process.... There is no doubt to be seen that the last presenting information of this kind is characteristic of one more than perception is one conceptual operation.

Constructs (Table III) also consider the elements of cognition systems as interconnected systems as interpreted the world they experienced.

Expected support for the findings of this present study are provided by Boudin, Chittenden and Brown (1978). After being intensively interviewed, sixty American elementary teachers who were attempting to follow more informal approaches to instruction were found by some of a thematic analysis to hold what were described as constructs "pragmatic." Eleven of these had a cognition or skills-based emphasis and six a more personal or growth-oriented orientation. In 1978, when Brown and Boudin (1978) looked at the ways British secondary teachers differed in their basic assumptions about the teaching of writing, a "transformation-interpretation" dimension was derived from the coded responses to the construct completion task. The content of this factor is recalled in the discussion of the two pedagogies provided in the present study.

It is important that the conceptual structures or constructs systems in teachers' personalizations are studied by calling into question any methods as well as the theoretical goal. The next challenge is to produce collaborative work which provides the construction of these constructs in action.

CONCLUSION

Although similarities were found to exist among the teachers' constructs regarding the teaching of writing, none of the category percentages in Table I is greater than .12. These data are around .12. It has to be acknowledged that there are considerable disagreements as well as a number of comments that is, not all the teachers used every construct to define their teaching. It is evident that groups of teachers with distinctive personal construct systems exists in the sample. By re-teaching the writing of these acts by the teachers it is possible to find that different members of this conceptual group are using distinctive subgroups or even competing parallels.

The teachers' constructs, however dependent, with constitute only one level of the writing of teaching writing. In order to act upon these ideas, teachers must not only process them but also be committed to them. The concept of commitment is considered to be an attitude that accounts for the fact that teachers consistently agree or disagree with a point of view regarding the teaching of writing. The subsequent research

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TABLE 4. CONSTRUCTS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING
OF MEDICAL CONSTRUCTS

No.	Title	Weighting value/total
1	Teacher-Student Relationship	.27
10	The Intellectual Matter	.15
100	Education	.57
101	Teacher	.15
102	Education in Learning	.27
103	Developmental Learning Program	.15
104	The Importance of Task	.15
105	The Social Matter	.15
106	The Pedagogical Teaching of Learning	.15
107	Learning Style	.15
108	Teacher Development	.15
109	Issues of Education	.15
110	The Ideal Teacher of Learning	.15
111	Developmental Social Organization	.15
112	The Pedagogical Teaching of Learning	.15
113	The Social Learning	.15
114	Teacher's Behavior and Cognitive Level	.15
115	Teacher Education	.15
116	The Teaching of Mathematics	.15
117	Education of Developmental Teaching of Learning	.15